

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
OFFICE OF MARINE SAFETY

In the Matter of:

"FIRE ON BOARD M/V COLUMBIA"

Date of Fire: June 6, 2000

Docket No.:  
DCA00MM030

Recorded Interview CAPTAIN GEORGE M. BRERETON.

Onboard M/V COLUMBIA  
Interviewed in the Wheel House  
Moored at Auke Bay  
Alaska Marine Highway System  
Marine Terminal North of  
Juneau, Alaska

June 8, 2000

BEFORE:

ANTHONY MURRAY  
Marine Accident Investigator  
NTSB Operations Group Chairman

LIEUTENANT JAMES BARLETT  
US Coast Guard, Marine Safety Office  
Juneau, Alaska

CAPTAIN NORM EDWARDS  
Vessel Operations Manager  
State of Alaska Marine Highway System  
(arrived during the middle of interview)

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(4:15 p.m.)

MR. MURRAY: My name is Anthony Murray from NTSB, Marine Accident Investigator, interviewing Captain George M. Brereton. He's the Master of the Columbia, the Motor Vessel Columbia.

And today is June 8, the year 2000. It's 4:15 Juneau time. We're in Juneau, Alaska.

And also Captain Brereton is party to the investigation, as well as Lieutenant James Bartlett.

And also, not present but a member of our party here, is Captain Norm Edwards, Vessel Operation Manager of State of Alaska, Alaska Marine Highway System.

And, basically, Captain George, will you just give us a narrative of the events leading up to the incident and your operations during the fire and afterwards?

And maybe give us all the way up to when the ship was under tow and arrived back here to the dock in Juneau.

I'll just lay this recorder next to you.

CAPTAIN BRERETON: Would you like me to read the log? Do you want times now on this or not?

MR. MURRAY: Yes, if that's -- you can read

1 from the log book.

2 CAPTAIN BRERETON: The log book's right  
3 there. I might as well bring it along.

4 MR. MURRAY: Okay, yes. Anything that helps  
5 you with the interview, that would be fine.

6 CAPTAIN BRERETON: Basically, on Tuesday,  
7 June 6, we were en route from Juneau, our Auke Bay  
8 terminal here, to our terminal in Sitka, Alaska.

9 The ship was running behind schedule due to a  
10 large load. And we were making a little bit faster  
11 than our standard operating speed. I believe, 19.4  
12 knots.

13 At 1207 hours, I became aware of a problem  
14 when the lights and the power in the Chief Mate's room  
15 started flickering. The Chief Mate and I immediately  
16 ran to the bridge, and we observed a number of alarms  
17 going off.

18 One of the watch officers, I'm not sure  
19 which, reported to us that there was a fire in the  
20 control booth. I immediately gave them the order to  
21 sound the general alarm.

22 I stepped up to the con, relieved the con,  
23 asked the helmsman if he had control of the rudder,  
24 instructed him to put the rudder amidships and looked  
25 at my gauges.

1           Saw that the starboard engine was starting to  
2   go astern pitch and that the turns were coming down in  
3   the engines and pulled the throttles back amidships.

4           At that point, we started silencing alarms  
5   and trying to establish communications. My chief mate  
6   immediately went to the microphone after he rang the  
7   general alarm and proceeded to say "This is not a  
8   drill. Passengers, muster at the upper decks.  
9   Emergency squad muster at the E-squad locker." And  
10   that there was "a fire reported in the engine room."

11           He then departed. Communications were  
12   established via VHF radio. The pilot remained on the  
13   bridge with me and the alarms were silenced by us.

14           We did have trouble locating a silence for  
15   one alarm. The other alarms reactivated several times.

16           I activated the power to the emergency announcing  
17   system and -- what happened next? I'll just open the  
18   log book and see what we've got here.

19           I don't have a copy of my detailed time  
20   lines, so this will be a little bit more general than I  
21   could with those notes.

22           The passengers were mustered up into the boat  
23   deck area. The ship was swept looking for casualties  
24   or misplaced persons.

25           The emergency squad reported to the vehicle

1 deck with their equipment. I was able to have limited  
2 reports of what was going on in the fire but it sounded  
3 like my chief mate was not able to get real accurate  
4 reports as to the extent of the fire because the  
5 engineers that were first on scene and immediately  
6 started fighting it, when they surfaced for air they  
7 were gasping and sweating and couldn't get time to get  
8 a report before they slapped on another bottle and ran  
9 back down there.

10 So I didn't get a detailed report for a  
11 little while.

12 At 1240 -- no, excuse me, at approximately  
13 12:20 -- and I wrote "approximate" in the logs where  
14 there seemed to be discrepancies in the time line. And  
15 that could have been for whatever reason.

16 One person heard something before another.  
17 But, at approximately 12:20, I heard the fire was  
18 reported extinguished. And we were on the emergency  
19 power at that time.

20 We were trying to restart the navigation  
21 equipment because when we have a power interruption to  
22 the radar with the computers in it and some of our NAV  
23 equipment, we lose a signal and have to reinitialize  
24 the equipment on the emergency circuit.

25 Am I going too fast?

1 MR. MURRAY: No. That's fine.

2 CAPTAIN BRERETON: Okay. Before the fire was  
3 reported extinguished, I had had communication on the  
4 VHF radio, channel 16 with the State Ferry Taku.

5 The pilot suggested, he said, "The Taku is in  
6 the immediate area. We just talked to her on the  
7 radio. Do you want her to stand by?"

8 I said, "Yes." Grabbed the microphone, asked  
9 the Taku, or maybe he asked the Taku to stand by. It  
10 might have been him that -- and then they responded  
11 affirmatively.

12 Then the Anacapra came on and I responded to  
13 the Anacapra, "Yes, come on over and stand by, and  
14 please pass this on up the line if Station Juneau  
15 hasn't heard our conversation yet."

16 Because our radar and our GPS were  
17 temporarily knocked out, I asked the Taku to give us  
18 our initial position, which I logged, which I noted and  
19 later logged.

20 The fire was reported extinguished. The  
21 chief mate asked permission to ventilate. And they  
22 opened the vehicle doors and ventilated the car deck.  
23 And we had some reports at some point -- I don't  
24 remember the time line -- that smoke had got up in the  
25 interior spaces.

1 I gave permission for them to ventilate the  
2 outer decks and the boat deck and let people go out on  
3 to the boat deck and get fresh air. So some smoke did  
4 get up into the interior throughout the ship.

5 I did step out on the bridge wing. We  
6 observed smoke coming up through the fiddley area.  
7 There is air passage up through the fiddley.

8 I instructed my messenger, who was one of the  
9 watchmen who was up here, to go back and safely place  
10 the back of his hand on the door and then cautiously  
11 opened that space and see, in fact, that we didn't have  
12 any fire coming up through the stack area.

13 And there wasn't.

14 At approximately 12:40 -- the ship was dead  
15 in the water. The Taku was standing by, and the  
16 Anacapa was standing by. And at approximately 12:40 we  
17 had a report of a reflash of the fire.

18 And at that point, I determined that this was  
19 of sufficient danger that I wanted all the fire screen  
20 doors on the whole ship closed, the fuel to both  
21 machinery spaces shut off, and all the ventilation  
22 secured throughout the ship.

23 Up until that point, we had local instruction  
24 to secure the fire screen doors in the passenger areas  
25 and on scene and ventilation as well.



1                   To my knowledge, that engine room fire screen  
2 window cover is the only safety apparatus that didn't  
3 close completely. I believe all the other doors on the  
4 ship worked fine.

5                   About this time, we received a four-man fire  
6 team from the Anacapra. And they stood by while we got  
7 some more air bottles from the M/V Taku. And they made  
8 preparations to reenter the space.

9                   And I believe it was on that entry that the  
10 panels were opened up down below. I'm not sure. We'll  
11 get the facts sorted out on that.

12                  And in communication with Juneau, we  
13 determined we needed to get the passengers off the ship  
14 for their safety because the lack of knowledge of how  
15 dangerous the fire was.

16                  I suggested that I approach the Master of the  
17 Taku with the idea of bringing her alongside, on the  
18 leeward side, and I said I think that the Master over  
19 there will agree to this. If he does, do I have  
20 permission to do that? He said yes.

21                  BY MR. MURRAY:

22                  Q       He said yes?

23                  A       I was talking on the cell phone with the  
24 command center, Captain Capacci.

25                  Q       Sorry.

1           A       That's okay. And this was like our second  
2 phone call. They [Alaska Marine Highway] were notified  
3 at some point when we had the alarms out and the  
4 equipment reinitialized and the Coast Guard notified.

5                   Now, when I initially spoke to them, I didn't  
6 have a very good cell signal. There was a little  
7 confusion as to the exact number of people on board.  
8 However, the Coast Guard was given a very accurate  
9 account.

10                   They misheard. When they asked, "How many  
11 people do you have?" I said, "Almost 500." In fact, I  
12 had 497, I believe, counting my passengers and crew.

13                   I said, "I don't know, 500, 490 something."  
14 I couldn't reach my notes from the cell phone. They  
15 thought I said 590 something.

16                   So there was a little confusion there I think  
17 between the Coast Guard and our command center when  
18 they started comparing numbers. They asked me later,  
19 and I said, "Well, let give me a chance I'll get you  
20 the exact numbers." That was cleared up later.

21                   Also later in this event, it's a discrepancy  
22 in numbers of passengers. I'm quite confident that our  
23 physical count was accurate; though our manifest said I  
24 had 434 passengers, we counted 435. And that was a  
25 stowaway is our presumption, which we get -- if you

1     want to go into details of how people can stow away, we  
2     can do that later.

3             We don't know who it was but there was a  
4     stowaway.

5             Q     That's understandable.

6             A     We're glad they got off anyway.

7             So the Taku came and rafted alongside us at  
8     1351. And it took us a little while. We constructed a  
9     transfer ramp by putting two pieces of staging side by  
10    side. We laid a 4 by 8 sheet of plywood across both  
11    pieces of staging so there wouldn't be any uneven  
12    walking surfaces.

13            And we put safety lines at hand rail height  
14    on either side of the ramp.

15            From the bridge ring, it looked like there  
16    was approximately a three-foot gap between the sponsens  
17    of the two ships. We couldn't close that gap without  
18    the Taku's bridge ring hitting the skin of the  
19    Columbia.

20            So we kept this tight, stern line and brought  
21    the gap to that distance. And we had approximately one  
22    foot of clearance between the bridge ring and the Taku  
23    and the skin in the Columbia, and a three-foot gap with  
24    the sponson where the passengers crossed over this  
25    bridge.

1           The evacuation transfer passenger started at  
2   1419. And what I did was instructed them to walk down  
3   the forward stairwell. The elevator, which is the  
4   other forward access, of course, was secured.

5           Prior to that time, I had given permission  
6   for passengers to go to their staterooms and their  
7   vehicles and get their wallets, identification and  
8   their pets if they wanted.

9           The chief purser had the most infirmed and  
10  aged patients -- passengers go down the stairwell  
11  first. I believe that I would do that differently. I  
12  would send the bulk of my passengers down first, I  
13  believe, and then have the slower people go later.

14          In case this became a crisis situation, I'd  
15  rather save two-thirds of my patients -- passengers  
16  than have one-third of them slowly go off the ship  
17  while the other two-thirds were in danger.

18          The other thing I would change is my cell  
19  phone was not on the emergency circuit. I started  
20  losing contact with Juneau with the numerous phone  
21  calls rather quickly.

22          The battery didn't hold up very long. And we  
23  later shifted the cell phone and were able to plug into  
24  this outlet, which is on the emergency circuit. And  
25  get better contact.

1           We were in a marginal coverage area and then  
2 we had problems losing voltage to the phone and having  
3 the line go dead in the middle of a conversation. With  
4 the lengthy conversations, the battery just couldn't  
5 charge up for a little while.

6           But, after things slowed down, we had fine  
7 communications. I did have the VHF at all times, and  
8 only one VHF on the emergency circuit. And this ship  
9 has two side bands in the emergency circuit. I'm going  
10 to change that. I want two VHF's and one side band on  
11 the emergency circuit.

12           We don't use the side-band as a regular means  
13 of communication here. And so that's a change I'm  
14 going to make to the vessel.

15           The chief engineer came to me while we were  
16 transferring passengers and had some concerns about his  
17 fire-fighting team and their ability to deal with this  
18 without securing the emergency generator.

19           They believed they had power in there that  
20 they needed to secure. He asked for permission to  
21 secure the emergency generator and I gave it to him.

22           So, at that point, we no longer had steering.  
23 And I temporarily lost some of my communications  
24 ability from the radios. And I went over and  
25 discovered a breaker thrown in the down position,

1     probably left over from shipyard period, which I have a  
2     motor generator in the back room which supplies power  
3     up here when we go on to the batteries.

4             And once I through that breaker, we got  
5     everything back. And there is a leave on sticker over  
6     there. I believe it just never got reactivated after  
7     the vessel was laid up.

8             CAPTAIN EDWARDS: Sorry for the delay.

9             MR. MURRAY: That's all right.

10            CAPTAIN EDWARDS: [Captain Norm Edwards  
11     arrives for the continuation of the interview.]

12            (Discussion off the record.)

13            MR. MURRAY: We're recording here.

14            CAPTAIN BRERETON: So I gave permission to  
15     the chief engineers to secure the emergency generator.

16     At that time, we were rafted up to the Taku and the  
17     passengers were moving across.

18            And our battery bank worked fine with the  
19     emergency lighting, which is what we were on already.  
20     So the evacuation went uninterrupted. And the fire  
21     team was able to proceed into the space and do what  
22     they had to do.

23            The other thing besides the steering I didn't  
24     have at my disposal was water on deck at that time.  
25     However, we hadn't needed it yet.

1           At 1520, the engine room restarted the  
2           emergency generator. And right after that, we  
3           activated a fire pump and cooled the car deck.

4           At 1523, the evacuation -- oh, I wrote the  
5           number wrong -- of the passengers and crew was  
6           complete.

7           MR. MURRAY: What time was it?

8           CAPTAIN BRERETON: 1523.

9           At 1534, the Taku took us in tow. I used two  
10          of my long bow lines out the two chocks forward of the  
11          bitts and took a tow astern.

12          MR. MURRAY: And two lines, you said/

13          CAPTAIN BRERETON: Two lines, 150 foot, seven  
14          and a half inch composite. There's no simple formula  
15          for this line. Let's say they're polydacron composite  
16          mooring lines. The standard mooring lines for a ship.

17          At 1607, the Taku let us go and began their  
18          medivac with one of our passengers to a Coast Guard  
19          helicopter, who had chest pains that turned out to be  
20          later angina. And this person is a frequent visitor of  
21          the local hospital, according to Captain Capacci.

22          At 1618, Dave Rikel, Eric Bauer, Troy Dixon  
23          and Galen Brevik board the ship. They came via  
24          helicopter and then somehow got into a small boat. I  
25          don't know if it was via the Anacapra or not. But,

1     they came aboard.

2               CAPTAIN EDWARDS:  It wasn't via Anacapa.

3               CAPTAIN BRERETON:  From a small boat,  
4     inflatable, on to our stern.

5               They came up to the wheelhouse, starting  
6     interviewing me.  That was a little bit interrupted  
7     because the towing vessels were coming alongside.  And  
8     at 1642, we were taken in tow by the tug, Banner.  We  
9     had the tug Artie, and the Coast Guard cutter Anacapa  
10    escorted us back to Juneau, and made approximately four  
11    knots.

12              The investigative team that flew out from  
13    Juneau and the Coast Guard fire team, the four persons  
14    from the Anacapa remained on board throughout the  
15    evening with us.

16              We could have made Juneau by 0500 but we had  
17    two ships at this berth and we slowed our arrival as we  
18    came through a fairly narrow pass just outside of town  
19    here, and arrived at 0845, by the time we got the lines  
20    made up.

21              MR. MURRAY:  Thanks for that narrative, and  
22    just a couple of questions that I had.

23              CAPTAIN BRERETON:  Okay.

24                           E X A M I N A T I O N

25              BY MR. MURRAY:



1           Q       If you could explain a little bit how the  
2 passengers were notified where to go and how they  
3 reacted. Was there any confusion with passengers? Did  
4 they seem alarmed or anxious?

5           A       Well, because I had no direct contact with  
6 the passengers, I only have what was reported to me  
7 over the radio. My observation was that this was the  
8 most orderly disaster I could imagine. That's what I  
9 saw from up here.

10                   I saw the passengers on the deck. I saw the  
11 passengers walking across the bridge. My purser  
12 reported to me that the PA system wasn't working well  
13 so the communications then was checked and confirmed  
14 that we were not getting out on this microphone here,  
15 which goes through an amplifier bank to the chief  
16 purser's office.

17                   I don't know if it's working yet. That's a  
18 monitor. It still doesn't work. I then went over to  
19 this panel, energized amplifier one, the emergency loud  
20 speaker system.

21                   Started trying to use this panel and ask the  
22 chief purser if she heard me and she said, "No." This  
23 system was tested every singledrill. This is the first  
24 time that I've ever seen it fail.

25                   I switched circuits to the second bank. I

1 was trying to... these buzzers came on. I tried to  
2 answer them and tried to speak. I heard the attention  
3 signal, just as you heard, but when I got to the  
4 microphone on this circuit, I assumed this to be  
5 totally out. Now, last night, when I tested it, they  
6 were all the way off. The off speaker was on.

7 This amplifier is working, but the talk-back  
8 circuit appears to be shorted out, when I go to these  
9 circuits here. It looks like the wires have fused  
10 together and blew the circuit out, shorted that part.

11 I didn't realize at the time. I realized  
12 that when I checked the circuit out last night and go  
13 to the "all speakers" this doesn't work. However, it's  
14 not as dependable as the PA system. It's for most crew  
15 areas and the boat decks.

16 So that amplifier is working but there are  
17 shortages in the circuit.

18 We have had kind of an aging PA system that  
19 has required maintenance fairly regularly. The  
20 amplifiers, like I said earlier, in the purser's  
21 office, that was worked on. I was told a week ago it  
22 was working fine.

23 It is scheduled for replacement this next  
24 winter. The new regulations require the amplifiers be  
25 located in a more fire-safe space. We've designated

1 the space. We've made the plans; the modification  
2 hasn't been made yet.

3 Q All right. Thank you, Captain, for that.  
4 It's something that the company is going to address?

5 A Oh, yes.

6 Q And let me see. I had a question about the  
7 evacuation procedures when the passengers were  
8 transferring from their vessel to the Taku.

9 Were they wearing life jackets?

10 A Yes, they were. Wearing life jackets before  
11 they proceeded down the stairs. And there were  
12 stairwell guides all the way down and all the way  
13 across to the Taku, and all the way up, as far as I  
14 know, on the Taku.

15 Q And if we could get a diagram of the two  
16 ships, how they were tied up with lines, if you had it?

17 A Sure. There's a picture in last night's  
18 paper.

19 Q Okay, that's fine.

20 A But it doesn't have the tie-up diagram.

21 Q Okay. And also probably a sketch of the tow,  
22 a diagram.

23 A Sure.

24 MR. MURRAY: Give us a rough sketch to help  
25 us to...

1 I'll just stop the recording for now.

2 (Record paused.)

3 CAPTAIN BRERETON: This is a sketch of the  
4 two ships right along side. The wind was on the  
5 opposite side of the Columbia, so the Taku was on our  
6 leeward side in case the weather blew up.

7 I could provide somewhat of a lead for her so  
8 we didn't bounce. I didn't want to bounce around as we  
9 were transferring the people across this bridge.

10 The ships have a rather sharp knuckle in what  
11 we call the sponson in here to provide access to the  
12 vehicle ramps in port.

13 And our vehicle doors are located right  
14 there. And the vehicle doors were lined up one to the  
15 other, the ramps laid across, car-deck to car-deck,  
16 safety lines provided.

17 And it was a two-line tie-up, tight lines  
18 breasting.

19 MR. MURRAY: All right. Thank you, Captain.

20 BY MR. MURRAY:

21 Q Now, also, when you do your docking and  
22 undockings, do you use a tug boat assist?

23 A No. We have a bow thruster, twin rudders,  
24 twin engines.

25 Q So your captains are basically very well-

1 experienced ship-handlers?

2 A On some of our runs, the Taku -- let's see,  
3 the Leconte and Aurora -- on the Leconte, they do 35  
4 dockings a week. Here I get the least dockings of any  
5 of our masters, probably because of our long route and  
6 all the talent I have around here.

7 But we still hit seven ports in Alaska both  
8 ways a week. So we get lots of ship-handling.

9 Q Okay.

10 A I probably have got well over 2,000 dockings  
11 since I've been here.

12 Q So an evolution of this nature with the ship-  
13 handling, you and the Captain of the Taku felt  
14 comfortable performing this kind of an operation.

15 A Yes, and I felt the Taku, when she tapped  
16 back out, we were setting down a little bit. There was  
17 no damage but I was able to feel her, just steel on  
18 steel... But as the sterns came together, and that was  
19 it, we never bounced, never worked. It was a good  
20 solid contact when we tie-up.

21 For a while, he held up as we were getting  
22 the bow line squared away and the stern tightened up,  
23 he, with his bob thruster, kept his bridge wing from  
24 touching the skin of the ship until we had the stern  
25 lines set at the right tension. So that when they took

1     tension forward, we wouldn't do any damage to his  
2     bridge wing. And we never touched up there.

3             CAPTAIN EDWARDS:     Any fendering between  
4     the sponsons.

5             A     No. Fendering looked like a good way for  
6     someone to get hurt to me. Somebody came down there  
7     with a mattress. I said that isn't going to do  
8     anything between two ships of this size.

9             And somebody suggested timbers, and I said  
10    that's a good way to get somebody injured. I said I  
11    would rather see a little bit of damage to the vessels  
12    than these people on here safely.

13            As it was, we didn't do any damage.

14            MR. MURRAY: All right, thank you, Captain.  
15    I think you gave a very good narrative.

16            CAPTAIN BRERETON: You want to see a chart  
17    and a tow sketch, I believe.

18            MR. MURRAY: Yes, we'll see the chart, but we  
19    don't need the recording for that.

20            CAPTAIN BRERETON: Okay.

21            MR. MURRAY: I'll let, Lieutenant, do you  
22    have any further questions?

23            LIEUTENANT BARLETT: I do. And, thank you.  
24    I just want to reiterate where the Coast Guard's  
25    involvement is, it's a Marine Casualty Investigation.

1                   Since we're a party of interest. Our end  
2 here is to find out what happened.

3                   CAPTAIN BRERETON: Okay.

4                   LIEUTENANT BARLETT: Get lessons learned out  
5 to the fleet and to educate and it has nothing to do  
6 with punitive action at this point. So I'm just asking  
7 questions because, certainly, I wasn't on scene. And  
8 arm-chair quarterbacking can be done by all of us, but  
9 to no avail.

10                  CAPTAIN BRERETON: Do you guys give  
11 commendations? I've got a whole list of crew members.

12                  LIEUTENANT BARLETT: You do. And if you feel  
13 strongly enough about it, that's something that we  
14 would look into.

15                  CAPTAIN BRERETON: Great.

16                  LIEUTENANT BARLETT: As you spoke, I had  
17 questions and these are questions, and these are  
18 questions that, since the investigative side of our  
19 house is gatekeeper for all of our programs -- the ship  
20 guys, the fire-fighters, the airdales, and us.

21                  CAPTAIN BRERETON: Your questions are  
22 welcome, Lieutenant.

23                               E X A M I N A T I O N

24                  BY LIEUTENANT BARLETT:

25                  Q       You mentioned that at 1207 you saw the lights

1 flickering and that you and the Chief came up. And  
2 that you had established coms via VHF. And at this  
3 time, there was alarms going off and some you couldn't  
4 silence, and some you could.

5 Who did you establish coms with?

6 A I established communications after the alarms  
7 were sounded and the announcements were made, or we  
8 thought they were made.

9 The second mate reported to the bridge and  
10 the chief mate had come up with me and they took VHF  
11 radios, walked out the bridge. I established  
12 communications with them, and I instructed the pilot to  
13 establish communications with the purser and the  
14 stewards who have portable radios.

15 And we used two different frequencies. We  
16 used one frequency for the fire party and one frequency  
17 with the passenger muster in evacuation so that we  
18 wouldn't have crossed or conflicting communications.

19 This is a new procedure for the Alaskan  
20 Marine Highways. I set it up on the station bill. It  
21 was thirteen days old when this happened.

22 Actually, we had our drill fifteen days for  
23 our annual inspection for this casualty. That was the  
24 first time we put it into practice. And it worked.

25 And I'm going to recommend it as a Fleetwide



1 standard.

2 We decided to go that route because I don't  
3 want to panic the passengers by overhearing the radios  
4 in my crew members' hands talk about anybody being  
5 injured or the nature of the casualty. I want them to  
6 hear it from me in a calm voice or a crew member who is  
7 trying to do public relations.

8 And the pilot handled all the communications  
9 with the passengers via the chief steward, the 2nd  
10 steward and the chief purser.

11 I handle all the emergency communications  
12 with the fire party in the engine room via the chief  
13 mate, the 2nd mate, the 3rd mate and the watchman.

14 The pilot and I could then talk so we weren't  
15 trying to listen to two radios at once when we had  
16 breaks and talked back and forth about what we were  
17 doing.

18 The pilot kept the con for navigation but  
19 once we were getting (DIW) the water, we were both free  
20 to wander around the bridge and answer alarms and  
21 radios and phones. There was no need to navigate other  
22 than take an occasional position.

23 The pilot kept track of those positions. The  
24 Taku relayed the information to us until we  
25 reestablished our navigation.

1                   You weren't here when I told them our  
2   navigation equipment is temporarily knocked out when we  
3   shift to the emergency power bank. We have to  
4   reinitialize the radar, reinitialize the GPS, loran.

5           Q       And those work off your battery device that  
6   you --

7           A       Work off the emergency generator first.

8           Q       Right.

9           A       They also went down when we went to the  
10   battery bank because that breaker was... but we got them  
11   right back after that.

12                   So we had to reinitialize things twice.

13          Q       You mentioned you had problems with both the  
14   PA system and the talk-back system. The one thing that  
15   was confusing for us at shore side -- and you had  
16   mentioned a passenger counting -- how were you able to  
17   verify that you had the proper number of passengers  
18   accounted for?

19                   You mentioned that you did a passenger -- you  
20   mustered passengers and then you did a ship sweep and  
21   that you determined that everybody was there.

22                   How did you determine that there was total  
23   accountability?

24          A       I didn't determine there was total  
25   accountability. I left that to the purser. I had my

1 2nd mate. When we did the evacuation count, the number  
2 of people that went off. He is the most stickler for  
3 details I have in this crew. And we had an Alaska  
4 State Trooper opposite him verifying his count.

5 So my count of the number of people that went  
6 to the Taku was by my second mate, and the Alaska State  
7 Trooper, who I'm told had a counter as well.

8 They had a couple of people come over here  
9 from the Taku. That isn't something I wanted but it  
10 happened. I guess there was some people trying to help  
11 somebody else out. Things don't always go as planned.

12 But they kept track of that in their count.  
13 They both agreed that it was 435 passengers and six  
14 crew members.

15 Q That crossed that?

16 A That crossed over. My traffic count said  
17 that I had 434 passengers. I realized there was a  
18 discrepancy. I know we had stowaways and stuff like  
19 that, but I didn't write it up.

20 Then we did an additional sweep of the vessel  
21 at that time. In fact, I woke up at 2 in the morning  
22 and I says, "God, I didn't open the elevator and look  
23 in there." We went down and did it, but the  
24 engineering says it should have stopped on this deck  
25 with it being open.

1 I said, "Well, let's go make sure because  
2 that little space is closed off by the fire door."

3 so we went and made sure.

4 Q What time you -- it says "prior to the fire  
5 was out, the coms, you had made communication with the  
6 Taku." Do you know what time that was? You didn't  
7 mention a time.

8 A No, it was pretty quick after. And I think I  
9 made one note in the radio log and then I kind of  
10 forgot about it for the rest of this thing.

11 Ah, at 1210 I noted in the radio log that I  
12 made distress messages to the Taku and the Anacapa.  
13 And I signed it myself. And that is the only radio log  
14 unfortunately I made since then.

15 Q When did you do that? At 1210?

16 A At 1210, yes, sir.

17 Q That was a distress to Taku?

18 A To Taku at first because I knew she was in  
19 the vicinity. And then I /Anacapa. Now, when I say  
20 that, in my memory, I can't remember if I talked to the  
21 Taku or the pilot did.

22 But I know I talked to the Anacapa. The  
23 Anacapa came on as soon as they heard our traffic with  
24 the Taku, they came right back.

25 Q So they overheard the Taku coms or you

1 solicited them?

2 A No, I didn't know they were in the area they  
3 overheard our conversation with the Taku: "Columbia,  
4 this is the Coast Guard cutter Anacapa. We are..."  
5 whatever it was, "six or eight miles from your  
6 position. Would you like us to stand by as well?"

7 I said, "Yes, affirmative." And please pass  
8 this on to Juneau Radio along with our position.

9 Q You mentioned you opened the cardeck doors to  
10 ventilate?

11 A To ventilate, yes. After the fire was  
12 reported out. I don't know which ones we opened. I  
13 think we opened the starboard corridor and maybe -- I  
14 think that was it. It might have just been the start  
15 of the fire.

16 Q Would that be logged any place? Do you know  
17 who was on --

18 A It might be in the detailed log. The 3rd  
19 mate was taking pretty good notes. And when the Taku  
20 came alongside, they said, "We'll have to open the port  
21 cargo door." He says, "Well, I can't flip the ship  
22 around and I don't want the Taku on my windward side.  
23 So, yeah, open the door."

24 (Record paused.)

25 MR. MURRAY: Okay, we're back on recording

1 after passing an interview list.

2 BY LIEUTENANT BARLETT:

3 Q Your normal muster areas are in the forward  
4 lounge and the?

5 A Dining room and the snack bar.

6 Q And when there was smoke in those areas, or  
7 some perceived smoke, that's when you cut the  
8 passengers loose? You mentioned that the passengers  
9 could go out, smoke was in the spaces. And also in  
10 conjunction with that, a mate inspected the fidley.

11 A Yes. The watchman inspected the fidley. I  
12 didn't cut them loose at that time. I gave permission  
13 for them to go out. The instructions are to keep them  
14 inside so we can protect them from the elements on  
15 initial muster.

16 At that time, they asked if they could open  
17 the doors or let them go to the boat deck. Some people  
18 wanted to have a cigarette. They're nervous. They're  
19 frightened by the smoke.

20 I said, "Yes, let them go to the boat deck."

21 So they didn't go below at that time; they just went  
22 out on to those decks the same time we were ventilating  
23 down below.

24 Q Did they have life preservers at that point,  
25 or did they get those as they were making the

1 transition?

2 A No, I'm not sure. My instructions, the way I  
3 set up the station bill was: We'll put the life  
4 preservers on when we go to evacuate the ship.

5 And when I said, "You'd better get everybody  
6 in their life preservers" on the radio, they said,  
7 "They already are."

8 so I don't know when they got them on  
9 everybody.

10 Q Who would know that? Do you know?

11 A Talk to Melissa Wheeler. She probably gave  
12 the order.

13 Q It would have come right after you ordered to  
14 evacuate?

15 A It was before it. So that's okay.

16 Q Around 1240 you said that you received a  
17 reflash or there was a report of a reflash?

18 A There was a report of a reflash. Now I don't  
19 know if they were actually getting a reflash. That's  
20 up to how they interpret that thing. But, that was the  
21 report I got.

22 Q At that point, you requested that fuel oil  
23 was secured.

24 A Yes.

25 Q Vents were secured?

1           A       To the generator space and the main engine  
2    room. And I told the engineers that if they didn't  
3    have the shutters down to watch out because I was going  
4    to drop the fire stream doors throughout the ships via  
5    the a radio because I know how frightening those heavy  
6    doors are down below.

7                   And I told the passenger, or the crew that  
8    were holding radios to inform the passengers in case  
9    there happened to be a door that they didn't get  
10   secured.

11                   They were instructed to close the fire screen  
12   doors previously on those other decks manually. But  
13   there might have been some still open.

14           Q       At that time, did the car doors also...

15                   (Record paused.)

16                   MR. MURRAY: Okay, we're back on the tape.

17                   BY LIEUTENANT BARLETT:

18    Q       The ventilation we talked about, fuel oil  
19    shutdown.

20           A       So I gave the order for the Chief to shut  
21   them down remotely. They have controls in the car  
22   deck. I don't know if he did it remotely or on site,  
23   the engine room.

24                   I shut down the master ventilation and the  
25   fire screen doors from the bridge.



1           The side doors? You know, I don't know what  
2   happened. I think that side door stayed open, the one  
3   they were using to vent with down here. And I didn't  
4   even think of it.

5           Q       Because that was just prior to the port door  
6   being open because of the Taku in the area.

7           A       The Taku coming by.

8           Q       When the port door was open, was the  
9   starboard door closed? Do you know?

10          A       No, I don't think it was.

11          Q       So door status is a question.

12                 You mentioned that the fire team had arrived  
13   from the Anacapa but they stood by waiting for air  
14   bottles from Taku.

15          A       I think that's what happened. Before they  
16   went back into the space, they waited for our team to  
17   go in with them, I believe. And they needed the air  
18   bottles.

19                 The Anacapa comes with OBAs.

20          Q       Exactly. That's where I'm coming from. Who  
21   was waiting to go back into the space? Your team or--?

22          A       Our team.

23          Q       Your team. The Coast Guard team, what  
24   function did they paint, do you know?

25          A       You'd better ask somebody down there. I

1 didn't get very good reports.

2 Q That was the sketchy time when we were  
3 getting kind of incomplete reports and excited there  
4 and that kind of thing.

5 A Yea.

6 Q You mentioned you were on the cell phone, you  
7 discussed with the company, and when you said command  
8 center, I am assuming that it was AHMS.

9 A AHMS, I was talking with Captain Capacci and  
10 they had set up a command in the - off the  
11 Commissioner's office in the building where they work.

12 (SIDE B:)

13 That means of communication, would that be  
14 the normal stage in your ISM checklist? Is that how you  
15 would contact IC or the company rep?

16 A That's one of the methods, the cell phone.

17 Q The issue about you had the people that had  
18 physical shortcomings, let them go first. In  
19 retrospect, you felt that you would change that and let  
20 two-thirds of your people go, and one-third -- you just  
21 recognize that in kind of retrospect?

22 A Uh-huh. Yeah, because I was getting antsy,  
23 it was taking so long to get all the people over there.

24 And then when Melissa said, "Well, maybe I screwed up,  
25 I let the older, crippled people go down first."

1                   And we did have some people that we've got in  
2 wheelchairs and they were placed in wheelchairs and  
3 went down later.

4                   But, old people move slow down three flights  
5 of stairs.

6                   We have a lot of elderly passengers.

7           Q        Okay. And the other lesson learned was the  
8 cell phone as far as the power source/

9           A        Yes, this outlet where the cell phone is  
10 normally plugged into is not on the emergency circuit.

11          It is now plugged into the emergency circuit, though  
12 this is a temporary thing.

13          Q        That circuit there, would that be fed? The  
14 motor generator, is that off the E-circuit, or is that  
15 off the --

16          A        The motor generator feeds the E-circuit when  
17 the emergency generator is down. And it goes battery  
18 bank, to motor generator to inverter to power packs to  
19 12-volt radios.

20                   It's kind of a strange, circuitous route but  
21 it is all E-circuit.

22          Q        Okay, so that outlet is --

23          A        This is not powered by anything once we lost  
24 the ship's service generators. Cell phone, when we put  
25 it on, was more of a convenience than thinking of

1     putting in E-circuits. But I'm sure we are having to  
2     rethink that fleet wise because it's been a pretty  
3     reliable means of communication for us.

4             When I had the grounding of the Taku several  
5     years ago, that's the only way I could get out of that  
6     place was on a cell phone.

7             I couldn't get out on a radio. I could have  
8     got out on a side-band but because we don't monitor  
9     frequency, I'd been talking to Kodiak or somebody, if I  
10    could get out at all from there. You're way up in the  
11    fjord there. We were shocked the cell phone worked.

12            Q     You had mentioned the fire team that fought  
13    the fire. They were concerned about the back-feeding  
14    from the E-gen and resecured it for a time?

15            A     Yes, the Chief came up, personally came up to  
16    me and asked me, says, I want to resecure that  
17    emergency generator and make sure these circuits are  
18    dead. It shouldn't be heating the space but I'm not so  
19    sure can I secure it; I said yes.

20                    I said, "What am I going to lose?" You know,  
21    well, I won't be able to get the fire pumps to go up  
22    the stairs. So we put it back on and I gave the order  
23    go ahead and do it.

24            Q     So that was a crew decision versus a fire-  
25    fighting team decision?

1           What I'm getting at is was it a Coast Guard  
2 fire-fighting team? Because you had mentioned that the  
3 fire-fighting team that fought the fire had the  
4 concern, so we were going to --

5           A       I don't know if the Coast Guard voiced a  
6 concern. I imagine it was my engineer's concern, their  
7 fire-fighting. That's what I imagine. But, I'm not  
8 positive.

9           I know that my chief engineer personally came  
10 up to the bridge huffing and puffing with one of the  
11 assistants asking me permission to do this.

12          Q       The motor generator, you said that the switch  
13 is secured, there's a label that says "Keep on"?

14          A       It says "LV On." Leave on, right up above  
15 the switch. And the switch was on but the breaker was  
16 down for some reason. I have no idea why.

17          Q       Is that part of getting underway checklist  
18 that you would check gear?

19          A       No, I don't think that is on my getting  
20 underway checklist. It's usually left on all the time,  
21 not as a normal procedure for getting underway from  
22 port.

23                 Maybe, we need to come up with a getting out  
24 of shipyard checklist.

25                 (Interruption telephone.)

1           Q     All your crew was left save six, the cross-  
2     deck; correct? Everyone stayed but six?

3           A     Stayed on board, yes.

4           Q     Stayed on board.

5                     This is my last question. Thank you for...

6                     You had mentioned that about sixteen,  
7     eighteen Coast Guard crew, which consisted of  
8     Lieutenant Bauer, Lieutenant Jamie Dixon, and then Mr.  
9     Breddick and Mr. Rifle came on board in the small boat.  
10    They were not hoisted to the deck of the Columbia.

11          A     No.

12          Q     You had mentioned that they came on the  
13    bridge and they started interviewing and that they  
14    interrupted you.

15                    What did you mean by that?

16          A     Tug boats were maneuvering alongside to pass  
17    us lines and I was trying to make sure the tow made up  
18    smartly, and I just said -- we started asking questions  
19    and it looked like it was going to start developing  
20    into questions.

21                    And I could see that I wanted to pay  
22    attention to the questions, and I said, "Can we hold  
23    this off for a minute?" And they said, "Fine. Sure."

24                    So I didn't mean rudely or anything like  
25    that. They were just I can't do this right now.

1           Q       I want that feedback because we should be  
2       letting evolutions take place.

3           A       And Lieutenant Bauer said, "Oh, of course,  
4       excuse me."

5                   LIEUTENANT BARLETT: Thank you very much.

6           MR. MURRAY: Captain, just a follow-up  
7       question to that. When you were under tow by the  
8       commercial tugs, did you retrieve your steering power,  
9       have the generators turned back on?

10           CAPTAIN BRERETON: Oh, yes. As soon as the  
11       generator -- the generator was turned on three minutes  
12       before the ... evacuation was complete. So I had  
13       steering when we were under tow. And, in fact, I  
14       wanted to make sure of that.

15                   And we used it under tow behind the tug, and  
16       then when we started up for the narrow passageways.  
17       And we used it especially when the Taku had to slow  
18       down to drop us so we wouldn't have a collision and be  
19       overtaken.

20                   We made plans that he would break right and I  
21       would break left when they dropped the tow.

22           LIEUTENANT BARLETT: Do you know that it was  
23       three minutes prior to evacuation being completed?

24           CAPTAIN BRERETON: How do I know that?

25           LIEUTENANT BARLETT: Yes. That's --

1 CAPTAIN BRERETON: It's written in the log.

2 LIEUTENANT BARLETT: I don't know, but did  
3 someone put that in there? I mean, it's interesting  
4 that you would know that the E-gen, that you presumed  
5 steering, the E-gen was put on three minutes prior to  
6 the end of the evacuation. That's just really detail-  
7 specific.

8 CAPTAIN BRERETON: Like I said, I was blown  
9 away when my mate came up and had all these times. I  
10 said:

11 "You got all those times? How did you -- you  
12 have all those pages? How did you do that?"

13 She was running around. She was grabbing  
14 spotlights and grabbing radios and grabbing E-gear and  
15 running down here and running over there.

16 I had no idea she had all those notes. I  
17 mean you look at the pilot's and my notes, we don't  
18 have much. She comes up with three pages of notes. I  
19 couldn't believe it.

20 MR. MURRAY: Well, thank you, Captain, for  
21 partaking in this investigation. And you've been very  
22 helpful and knowledgeable in all the events. And I  
23 hope we can have some lessons learned from this event  
24 and in the future the Maritime industry and community  
25 can learn from this.



1           CAPTAIN BRERETON: If we save one life on  
2     some other ship, it's all worth it.

3           MR. MURRAY: Thank you, Captain. All right,  
4     this completes the interview.

5           (TAPE CONCLUDED.)